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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001932

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/22/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PUBLIC MORE OPTIMISTIC, BENEFITTING  
SAAKASHVILI, BUT ECONOMY AND TERRITORIES STILL DOMINATE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN R. BASS FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: Georgians are more optimistic about their futures even as they struggle economically, according to the International Republican Institute's (IRI) latest poll. The shift in mood and economic stabilization have benefited the President and his party; Saakashvili received a 10 point personal bounce. Opposition parties and leaders fared poorly, a carryover from last spring's counterproductive, unpopular street protests. The big question is how Saakashvili will interpret the results. We are working to persuade him to use this bounce to move smartly on several key democratic reforms. End Summary.

[¶2.](#) (C) Comment: The ruling National Movement leaders likely view these numbers with confidence -- a confidence which could lead them to inaction. It will be important that we and our European partners urge quick action on reform in the window before municipal elections in May 2010. The November Democracy Working Group provides an excellent venue for this discussion. Another take-away from the data below is the breadth of concern in Georgia's society for reintegration of the territories -- the President's focus reflects the thinking of the citizens of Georgia, not just his own pre-occupations. End Comment.

OVERALL OUTLOOK IS IMPROVING, AND THE PUBLIC OVERWHELMINGLY CONDEMNS PROTESTS

[¶3.](#) (C) The October results shows that Georgians are more optimistic than in the past about both political stability and the economy. The percentage of Georgians who think the country is going in the right direction jumped 15 points (from 26 percent in June to 41 percent in October). The poll seems to indicate the perception that the economic situation is stabilizing with most Georgians responding that their economic situation has improved or at least stayed the same (59 percent in October as compared to 42.3 percent in June). Fifty-nine percent of respondents evaluate President Saakashvili and the GOG's performance during the financial crisis as positive which is up compared to 47 percent in June.

[¶4.](#) (C) The number one issue of importance to Georgians remains unemployment. When those polled were asked to self identify the most important issue facing the country, they chose unemployment (59 percent) though territorial integrity remained second at 45 percent. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that the government should carry out economic reforms first before other fields such as healthcare, education, and defense (73 percent in Tbilisi, 72 percent in the regions). Internal politics has almost completely fallen off Georgians' radar and was mentioned by only four percent of those polled as a concern. In June, that number was 50 percent. Fear of war (translation: another Russian invasion) is the number one Georgian fear (mentioned by 58 percent).

[¶5.](#) (C) Respondents are strongly against aggressive forms of

protest with 90 percent responding that actions including the occupation of buildings and the blocking of roads, buildings, railway lines, and airports are unacceptable. Georgians even appear to be against peaceful forms of protest with at least 50 percent responding that petitions, legal demonstrations, and legal strikes are unacceptable forms of protest. An overwhelming majority (72 percent) said they do not support further street protests in the fall. The IRI Country Director (strictly protect), who briefed many of the political parties on the poll results, said that Salome Zourabichvili, leader of the Way of Georgia Party, was questioning the future of her party's direction given the strong aversion to protest action in the country. Zourabichvili's party has relied almost exclusively on street action as its means of political engagement in the past. Interest in politics in general decreased with 40 percent of respondents saying they have a low interest as compared to 34 percent in June.

IF ELECTIONS WERE HELD TODAY...

16. (C) Respondents want the GOG and opposition to maintain a dialogue (81 percent in June, 85 percent in October). A majority of respondents, 62 percent, say that the non-parliamentary opposition should unite to elect a single leader. Almost all the respondents (95 percent) believe that relations with the United States are good and a majority (60 percent) feel that the United States is Georgia's most important partner. NATO increased in popularity with 54 percent supporting joining the institution versus 45 percent in June. 38 percent of those polled saw joining NATO as more important than joining the EU, an increase of ten percent

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from June. Thirty-eight percent of respondents blamed Russia and the existence of conflicts (35 percent) as the biggest hindrance to Georgia's NATO membership as opposed to a lack of reforms (9 percent).

17. (C) The Georgian Orthodox Church continues to garner the most confidence from respondents (93 percent) closely followed by the army (84 percent) and the police (82 percent). The constitutional commission and the electoral working group only received a 28 percent favorable confidence rating; only trade unions (25 percent) and the Mafia network (10 percent) received lower. The ruling United National Movement (UNM) continues hold the top spot as the party that can best deal with Georgia's problems (35 percent) followed by the Christian-Democratic Movement (13 percent), Alliance for Georgia (12 percent), and the Labor Party (9 percent). Trust in the UNM rose 8 percent from June. The biggest leap, however; was Alasania's Alliance for Georgia which doubled its numbers in this trust measurement from June (6 percent).

18. (C) If parliamentary elections were held today, the ruling UNM would garner 43 percent of the vote followed by Alasania's Alliance (10 percent), Natelashvili's Labor (7 percent), and Targamadze's Christian-Democratic Movement (6 percent). In this poll, Alasania bested Natelashvili and Targamadze who were tied for the second spot in June's poll. Nino Burjanadze's Democratic Movement-United Georgia took the number one spot for the party that respondents would never vote for (20 percent). Saakashvili continues to lead in favorable ratings (70 percent) followed by Sozar Subari (64 percent), Irakli Alasania (63 percent), and Giorgi Targamadze (62 percent). If presidential elections were held without Saakashvili, Alasania would garner 20 percent of the vote followed by Targamadze (16 percent). However with Saakashvili as a candidate, Alasania drops to 14 percent, and Targamadze and Natelashvili both to 8 percent. Saakashvili himself had 39 percent (Embassy note: Saakashvili is term-limited and may not run again. End note). IRI's Country Director said that, during the briefing to parties, many of the opposition parties had expected a drop in their ratings and were pleasantly surprised to see that they were not lower. UNM told the Country Director that they were pleased

that their ratings confirmed their own private polling results and were not surprised by their increase in popularity.

#### MORE TRANSPARENCY WANTED

¶9. (C) The poll also indicated that Georgians do not feel they receive sufficient information -- 85 percent responded that they are not well informed, not at all informed, or don't know about the activities of their local government. Most respondents said that are not receiving enough information on the Constitutional Commission (58 percent) and the electoral code working group (60 percent). Almost all respondents receive their information from television (94 percent). Rustavi 2 (88 percent) and Imedi (87 percent) remain the most-watched and most-trusted TV channels. Media freedom was rated somewhat better with 52 percent of respondents saying that media was at least somewhat free as compared to 45 percent in June. Within the 34 percent who said that the media was not free, 70 percent said it was due to government pressure on the media. Weekly internet usage increased slightly from 17 percent in June to 20 percent in October. There is a large gap in weekly internet usage comparing Tbilisi (49 percent) to the regions (12 percent).

¶10. (SBU) The International Republican Institute (IRI) conducted a nationwide poll from September 29 to October 5, 2009 and put questions to 1500 Georgians aged 18 years and older in face-to-face interviews.

BASS